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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R. I.

Cruising CVBGs and Horizon MAGs: An Alternative Approach to Naval Forward Presence for the 21st Century

by

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Seminar 10

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations (JMO).

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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19990520
144

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DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

1. Report Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
2. Security Classification Authority:			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule:			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
6. Office Symbol: C	7. Address: NAVAL WAR COLLEGE 686 CUSHING ROAD NEWPORT, RI 02841-1207		
8. Title (Include Security Classification): CRUISING CVBGs AND HORIZON MAGS: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO NAVAL FORWARD PRESENCE FOR THE 21 ST CENTURY (Unclassified)			
9. Personal Authors: LCDR Jeffrey T. Griffin, USN			
10. Type of Report: FINAL	11. Date of Report: 5 February 1999		
12. Page Count: 17			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Naval, Forward, Presence, Cruising, Horizon, Carriers, Battle Groups, Maritime Action Groups (MAGs), CVBGs, Shaping, Responding.			
15. Abstract: Since the end of World War II, aircraft carrier battle groups (CVBGs) have formed the core component of naval power, forward deployed to regions of the world vital to U.S. interests. These formations have become the standard "building blocks" of naval forward presence, rotated overseas to provide the CINCs with balanced capabilities to deal with a variety of present and future threats. Faced with the dangers and challenges envisioned for the 21st Century, should the rotational deployment of CVBGs continue to be the <i>modus operandi</i> of naval forward presence? Existing policy calls for the continued pre-eminence of the CVBG into the next century in support of <i>Forward. . . from the Sea</i> . An alternate method combines two innovative proposals into a single concept of forward presence. The carrier continues to play a leading role, but would be deployed and operated under the concept of <i>cruising</i> proposed by Admiral Paul Reason. Maritime Action Groups would be created and would remain permanently deployed to key regions of the world, with crews rotated to the ships under the CNO SSG's <i>Horizon</i> concept. Naval forces packaged, deployed, and operated under these two concepts would provide the CINCs with the naval forward presence to execute the National Military Strategy of "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now."			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified X	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
17. Abstract Security Classification: UNCLASSIFIED			
18. Name of Responsible Individual: CHAIRMAN, JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT			
19. Telephone: 841-6461	20. Office Symbol:	C	

Abstract of

CRUISING CVBGs AND HORIZON MAGS: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO NAVAL FORWARD PRESENCE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Soon after assuming office, President Clinton expressed it quite clearly. "When word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it's no accident that the first question that comes to everyone's lips is: Where is the nearest carrier?" Since the conclusion of World War II, aircraft carrier battle groups (CVBGs) have formed the core component of naval power, forward deployed to regions of the world deemed vital to U.S. interests. These formations have become the standard "building blocks" of naval forward presence, rotationally dispatched overseas to provide the CINCs with balanced capabilities to deal with a variety of present and future threats.

Faced with the many dangers and challenges envisioned for the 21st Century, should the rotational deployment of CVBGs continue to be the *modus operandi* of naval forward presence? Existing policy calls for the continued pre-eminence of the CVBG into the next century in support of *Forward. . . from the Sea.*

An alternate method combines two innovative proposals into a single method of providing naval forward presence. The carrier would continue to play a leading role, but would be deployed and operated under the concept of *cruising* proposed by Admiral Reason. Maritime Action Groups would be created and would remain permanently deployed to key regions of the world, with crews rotated to the ships under the CNO SSG's *Horizon* concept.

Naval forces packaged, deployed, and operated under these two concepts would provide the combatant commanders with the appropriate naval forward presence to execute the National Military Strategy of "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now" for the challenges of a new era.

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*"The Navy was the first military force to respond to the invasion, establishing immediate sea superiority. And the Navy was also the first air power on the scene. Both of these firsts deterred --I believe--stopped, Iraq from marching into Saudi Arabia."*¹ -- General Norman Schwarzkopf

*"He who will not apply new remedies must expect new evils."*² -- Francis Bacon

Introduction

The question has been asked so many times that it has become a cliché amongst the personnel serving in the Pentagon, on the National Security Council, in Congress, and even within the news media. Soon after assuming office, President Clinton expressed his understanding that this indeed would be a question that he would ask numerous times throughout his presidency when he stated, "When word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it's no accident that the first question that comes to everyone's lips is: Where is the nearest carrier?"³ Faced with countless international crises, ranging from the North Korean attack across the 38th parallel in June 1950 to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, the naval forward presence provided by aircraft carrier battle groups (CVBGs) has enabled the United States to quickly and effectively respond to unforeseen events throughout the globe.⁴

Since the conclusion of the Second World War, CVBGs have formed the core component of naval power, forward deployed to the regions of the world deemed vital to U.S. national interests. These powerful formations have become the standard "building blocks" of naval forward presence, organized, trained, and equipped by the Navy and rotationally dispatched overseas to key geographic regions, "to provide the combatant commanders (CINCs) with adequately balanced capabilities to deal with a variety of present and future threats."⁵ But faced with the many dangers and challenges envisioned for the 21st Century, should the rotational deployment of CVBGs--to the Mediterranean Sea, Western Pacific Ocean, and Indian Ocean/Arabian Gulf-- continue to be the *modus operandi* of naval forward presence? The Navy

apparently feels that it should, since existing policy calls for the continued pre-eminence of the CVBG as "the essential foundation of our ability to conduct operations as envisioned in the most recent edition of our strategic concept, *'Forward ... from the Sea.'*"⁶

An alternate method of providing naval forward presence would seem to offer a more relevant package of naval power, capable of meeting the threats and challenges of the next century. This concept represents a hybrid of sorts, combining two innovative proposals relating to the organization and deployment of naval forces into a single, overall method of providing naval forward presence. The aircraft carrier would continue to play a leading role, however the composition of the CVBG and the manner in which it would be deployed and operated would change somewhat. Based on a deployment method of *cruising* proposed by Admiral Paul Reason, a reduced CVBG would conduct notional around-the-world cruises quite different from the current deployment pattern.⁷ To complement *cruising* CVBGs, separate Maritime Action Group formations would be created, and would remain permanently deployed to key regions of the world, with individual platforms kept on station for up to three years. Crews would rotate to these ships under the *Horizon* concept articulated by the Chief of Naval Operations Strategic Studies Groups (CNO SSG).⁸ Collectively, naval forces packaged, deployed, and operated under these two concepts would provide the combatant commanders with the appropriate naval forward presence to "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now" for the threats and challenges of a new era.

Thesis

In order to provide the CINCs with the best capability to execute the National Military Strategy in the coming century, the Navy should consider deploying *Horizon* Maritime Action Groups and *cruising* CVBGs as an alternative approach to naval forward presence.

Roadmap

This paper will address the manner in which naval forces should be *organized, deployed, and operated* in the 21st Century to provide the CINCs with the most relevant and effective form of naval forward presence. The author will begin by examining the manner in which CVBGs conduct naval forward presence operations today, and then briefly discuss plans for the future. The paper will next present an alternative method of providing naval forward presence and, based on the National Military Strategy cornerstones of "Shaping" and "Responding," demonstrate why this method is preferable to the Navy's current direction. Constrained by the scope of analysis, the paper will not address the form of naval forward presence provided by Amphibious Ready Groups with embarked Marine forces. Neither will this paper examine force structure and force planning issues or inter-service battles over roles and missions. The author will examine the concept of naval forward presence using the approved Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) force structure and will make the assumption that the National Command Authorities will mandate that naval forward presence be continued in support of national security interests and objectives.

Naval Forward Presence Today

The Navy's peacetime mission and primary contribution to the execution of the National Military Strategy is to "conduct forward presence operations to help shape the strategic environment by deterring conflict, building interoperability, and by responding, as necessary, to fast-breaking crises with the demonstration and application of credible combat power."⁹ Naval forward presence remains especially appealing to the Department of Defense, for it allows the United States to act independently, without relying upon overseas bases and host-nation support. Today naval forces deploy forward as CVBGs, primarily to three key theaters--the

Mediterranean Sea, Western Pacific Ocean, and Indian Ocean/Arabian Gulf--on a scheduled, rotating basis. A typical deployment pattern involves approximately 1 month spent in transit to the Area of Responsibility (AOR), 4 months on station, and a return transit of 1 month.¹⁰ The standard CVBG composition includes a single aircraft carrier with embarked air wing, escorted by five or six surface combatants (cruisers, destroyers, and frigates), two nuclear attack submarines and a multi-purpose replenishment ship. A carrier battle group deploying with less than this standard configuration is referred to as a "CVBG Minus."¹¹

The constancy of presence of a CVBG in a given AOR can be divided into four categories:

- Continuous Presence: Assigned Forces within theater 100% of the time.
- Continuous Coverage: Assigned Forces within theater 100% of the time or on explicit "tethers."
- Periodic Presence: Assigned Forces within theater less than 100% of the time, but on a planned and regularly recurring basis.
- Episodic Presence: Assigned Forces deployed within or between theaters on an irregular or ad hoc basis.¹²

The Global Naval Force Presence Policy (GNFPP), maintained by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, establishes the minimum requirements for the forward presence of CVBGs, and specifies the minimum number of days in a year that a carrier must be present in a particular AOR.¹³ Prior to the most recent crises with Iraq over United Nations arms inspections, existing guidance had called for continuous presence in the Western Pacific and continuous coverage (on average 79%) for each of the other two regions.¹⁴ The continuous Western Pacific presence requirement is somewhat overstated, however, by allowing the Japan-based CVBG to cover forward presence requirements even while in port.¹⁵ Resultant periods when carriers are not physically present are referred to as "gaps"--which cannot exceed a GNFPP-specified limit--but are compensated for by the allowance that forces may remain on "tether," permitting them to operate outside the AOR, but within limits to meet explicit response times.

The Navy organizes and deploys formations other than CVBGs, including Surface Action Groups (SAGs), but only infrequently and for limited, specific purposes such as the cooperation afloat readiness and training (CARAT) deployments to Southeast Asia, or the West Africa training cruises. Each represent primarily show-the-flag training events, sometimes derisively referred to as "cocktail cruises." The exception is the Middle East Force, which includes surface combatants and mine warfare ships that deploy independently to the Arabian Gulf and provide limited forward presence during gaps in CVBG coverage.

The Future of Naval Forward Presence: *Forward ... from the Sea*

A review of the Navy's capstone document reveals that the manner in which the service plans to conduct forward presence operations into the next century will change very little. *Forward ... from the Sea*, the Navy's strategic concept for the post-Cold War era, emphasizes that "our basic presence 'building blocks' remain Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups--with versatile, multipurpose, naval tactical aviation wings . . . these highly flexible units are valued by the theater commanders precisely because they provide the necessary capabilities forward."¹⁶ The document acknowledges that for certain crisis-response operations, mission-tailored task groups such as a "surface battle group" will be assembled, with the implication that these groups will be formed *ad hoc* and will not become a standard force package deployed to provide forward presence. The deployment pattern of the CVBGs will also remain largely unchanged, continuing to revolve around rotational deployments to a designated AOR. This manner of packaging, deploying, and operating naval forces has unquestionably been responsive and effective in the past, as documented in a single, revealing statistic: "The U.S. government has employed military force in responding to foreign crises more than 200 times since 1945, and in two-thirds of these instances the U.S. Navy task forces sent into harm's way have had aircraft carriers as their major offensive

component.”¹⁷ But the world has changed immeasurably since the end of the Cold War--the relatively stable, bi-polar era during which the vast majority of the aforementioned crises occurred. In assessing naval forward presence requirements to support the regionally focused National Military Strategy for the next century, one would be wise to hearken back to Francis Bacon’s warning to expect new evils if new remedies are not applied, or perhaps heed the more modern financial caveat that “past performance is not a guarantee of future success.”

21st Century Naval Forward Presence: An Alternative Approach

As briefly introduced, an alternative approach to organizing and deploying naval forces to provide forward presence combines and expands upon two innovative operational concepts--*Cruising* and *Horizon*--to establish two core components designed to enable the CINCs to carry out the National Military Strategy. The first component remains the CVBG, but re-structured and deployed in a significantly different manner. Rather than continue to operate under the familiar “transit-presence in AOR-return transit” formula, CVBGs would *cruise* the world’s oceans in a modified variant of Admiral Reason’s proposed *cruising* force. Specifically, CVBGs would conduct around-the-world, six-month cruises while engaging in a host of diverse activities. Unencumbered by GNFPP requirements, *cruising* CVBGs would retain the flexibility to operate in, or by-pass altogether, individual AORs based on the current situation in the region, thereby providing periodic or episodic presence. During the cruise, the force would participate in “show the flag” diplomatic port calls, multinational or alliance/coalition training exercises, and other operations throughout the world. Most notably the group would conduct truly *global* engagement activities, with visits to areas not traditionally frequented with CVBG presence, for as one Navy squadron commander pointed out, “save Perth, Singapore, and the Riviera for

occasional liberty; we need to call on the towns and cities of Africa, South America, and Southern Asia as well.”¹⁸

The standard composition of the *cruising* CVBG would be reduced to the carrier, two surface combatant escorts, one attack submarine, and a replenishment ship--considerably less than what now composes a CVBG Minus. This revised CVBG structure maintains the flexibility to respond to a crisis requiring the carrier’s presence, since the carrier and a single escort could quickly break off from the group and transit at high speed (25-30 knots) with the carrier refueling the escort ship en route. With two CVBGs *cruising* the world’s oceans on any given day, under most circumstances a CVBG would be capable of arriving on scene in under 5 days.

The balance of the surface combatants and attack submarines included in the QDR force would become part of the other core component of naval forward presence. This second component adds an additional “building block”--the Maritime Action Group (MAG)--permanently deployed to key theaters under the *Horizon* concept. As differentiated from the SAG, which is a formation of several surface combatants, a MAG builds upon the SAG by adding nuclear attack submarines, land-based Navy P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, and possibly Air Force aircraft such as AWACS.¹⁹ A typical 21st century MAG might consist of:

- 4-6 cruisers, destroyers, and frigates with theater ballistic missile defense (TBMD), naval surface fire support (NSFS), and strike capabilities,
- 1-2 attack submarines, providing anti-submarine warfare, strike, and special operations forces-delivery capabilities,
- 1-2 mine warfare ships,
- 1-2 dedicated alert P-3 aircraft, and
- Air Force AWACS, fighter, and tanker aircraft (optional, as required and available).

In the author’s conception of individual MAG composition, the Navy would structure each group based on the particular requirements of the AOR, including a consideration of such factors as threat, geography, operating environment, and the availability of land-based air support. In a

theater with a negligible TBM threat, for example, the MAG would be allocated fewer TBMD capable platforms. These regionally-tailored MAGs would deploy to the areas of the world deemed most vital to U.S. national interests; initially, the author envisions the deployment of three MAGs--to the Mediterranean Sea, Southwest Asia, and East Asia--with a fourth available for an additional region to be designated. The MAGs would only *deploy* overseas, not be "home-ported" there, permitting the Navy the flexibility to shift MAGs from one region to another based on changes in the long-term situation. Individual components of a regional MAG could also be temporarily re-assigned to an AOR with a greater immediate need for enhanced naval forward presence.

The Navy has previously experimented with the MAG concept, most notably in the Sixth Fleet from 1991-92. During and immediately after the Gulf War, CVBGs deploying to the Mediterranean separated into in effect a CVBG Minus and a MAG.²⁰ This split allowed the carrier allocated to the Sixth Fleet to cover Arabian Gulf requirements, while the MAG remained in the Mediterranean, operating with AWACS and P-3s to provide a measure of continued naval presence in the region. The MAG deployment concept has not, however, been institutionalized by the Navy as a core "building block" of naval forces. The most recent policy merely requires that CVBGs maintain the ability to break away a "slice of the battle group," termed a *scouting force*, to perform air defense and anti-surface warfare duties forward of the formation.²¹

Unique to this alternative approach is the adoption of the *Horizon* concept as the foundation for the deployment of MAGs in the designated AORs. Developed by the CNO SSG, *Horizon* calls for maintaining platforms forward deployed for up to three years, with personnel rotated to the platforms as individuals, watch teams, or occasionally as entire crews. The concept proposes organizational changes within the fleet which would dramatically increase the percentage of

naval personnel available for deployment in an operational duty status. The major benefits of *Horizon* include the ability to support continuous naval presence, while at the same time provide more platforms in CONUS operationally ready for crisis response on demand.²²

Executing the National Military Strategy: Shaping

This alternative deployment concept provides the combatant commander with an improved capability to accomplish the National Military Strategy objective of “Shaping” the international environment--specifically through peacetime engagement activities, deterrence, and participation and leadership in coalitions and alliances.²³ Promoting regional stability is the primary goal of peacetime engagement, and heavily involves actions taken to signal U.S. commitment and resolve, as well as to influence friends, adversaries, and uncommitted nations in a region.

In maintaining naval forces forward to conduct presence operations, a careful balance must be struck between the lethality of combat power required, and the visibility and intensity of the signal which the nation desires to send. With respect to influencing potential or actual adversaries, the effectiveness of naval forward presence operations depends largely upon the nature of the forces deployed. As Linton Brooks of the Center for Naval Analyses discusses, powerful forces must be maintained continuously in these regions for two primary reasons:

First, an adversary may misinterpret the absence of militarily significant forces from the region as a lack of interest and thus a lack of resolve. Second, by having military forces in a given region, the United States reduces the risk that an adversary may believe it can present us with a *fait accompli* before the nation has time to react.²⁴

When tensions with the adversary rise, the increased deterrent effect and visibility of a *cruising* CVBG could be called into the region to send the strongest signal of U.S. commitment and resolve.²⁵ When attempting to improve relations with an adversary, however, the naval presence of a MAG sends a more moderate signal--avoiding the adverse political reaction to a CVBG and its traditional implication of coercion--while still maintaining a potent military force engaged in

the region. In East Asia, for example, the normal peacetime presence would include the regional MAG, but as the year 2000 Taiwanese national elections approach the CINC could call for the presence of a *cruising* CVBG to bolster the naval presence in the region. The risk of conflict with the adversary, moreover, requires that deployed naval forces be equipped with superior self-defense systems--which the advanced surface combatants and attack submarines of the MAG would possess.

To influence friendly nations in the regions, a delicate balance again must be struck between the combat potency required and the signal of resolve and commitment desired. Analysis has shown the potential value of *varying* Navy deployment patterns, which the transition to *cruising* CVBGs would certainly entail. Although sustained presence demonstrates resolve, it may over time be taken for granted and thus offer only limited influence in the region. As Brooks noted, brief absences of naval forward presence, as in today's periods of gapped CVBG coverage, "may be more visible than their extended presence, and lead to concern that the United States might be downgrading the region."²⁶ When a friend or ally faces a specific, defined military threat, however, Brooks points out that "effective reassurance requires forces with military capabilities that the friend or ally will perceive as both strong and relevant."²⁷ In this circumstance, the dispatch of a *cruising* CVBG to augment the MAG would be most appropriate to the situation. Under more stable, peacetime conditions the permanently deployed MAG would provide the friend or ally with the required "comfort factor" through its constancy of presence, while in a crisis the flexibility of *cruising* CVBGs would allow the CINC to quickly call upon more powerful forces in response to a direct military threat.

In the case of presence operations undertaken to influence the uncommitted nations of a region, the more moderate signal sent by the surface combatants of the MAG (as opposed to the

CVBG) would be more appropriate to help move these countries to some degree of friendship, while avoiding negative political ramifications. The cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and submarines of the MAG would seem to be ideal for this purpose, since they would allow U.S. naval forces to build interoperability and mutual confidence with the forces of the potential ally, yet avoid the symbol of coercion embodied in the CVBG's overwhelming combat power.

Peacetime deterrence represents another critical element of the "Shaping" function. As noted in the National Military Strategy, effective deterrence rests on "our potential adversaries perception of our capabilities and commitment--demonstrated by our ability to bring decisive military power to bear and by communicating U.S. intentions."²⁸ In examining the deterrent value of naval forces forward deployed in presence operations, the specific case of TBMD seems most appropriate to address. In the latter part of this century, TBMs have become the weapon of choice of numerous rogue states and potential adversaries, used for such purposes as regional coercion and indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations. Between 1980 and 1996, such nations as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Yemen, and China have employed TBMs operationally, while numerous other nations, including North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Syria now maintain TBMs in their arsenals.²⁹ The recent North Korean launch of a Taepo Dong 1 TBM over the Japanese mainland served as a "wake up call" and a reminder of the seriousness of this problem. Additionally, many of the nations mentioned continue to develop more advanced and longer range TBMs, along with the capability to arm these weapons with warheads containing weapons of mass destruction. Given the history of these countries and their relatively poor relations with the United States, the threat of U.S. forces, as well as regional friends and allies, coming under TBM attack remains quite real. Little advance warning and a lack of pre-launch indicators characterize TBM attacks, but their potential effects can be devastating both

politically and militarily. In regions of the world where potential adversaries threaten U.S. friends and allies, a gap in the TBMD coverage provided by naval forces could allow an aggressor to exploit this opportunity to conduct TBM attacks on its neighbors. Forces tasked to the defense against TBM attack must remain positioned at or near the scene at all times. Eighty-percent naval forward presence coverage of these regions imposes significant risk to U.S. and allied interests and may not be sufficient in the next century.

Forward . . . from the Sea acknowledges that the naval presence provided by surface combatants with TBMD capability will become increasingly valuable in the future for several specific reasons:

Forward-deployed surface warships--cruisers and destroyers--with theater ballistic missile defense capabilities will play an increasingly important role in discouraging the proliferation of ballistic missiles by extending credible defenses to friendly and allied countries. By maintaining the means to enhance their security and safety, we may reduce the likelihood that some of these nations will develop their own offensive capabilities. Our efforts will thereby slow weapons proliferation and enhance regional stability.³⁰

The Navy's development of the Area and Theater-wide TBMD systems for *Aegis* cruisers and destroyers will provide these surface combatants with a credible TBMD capability early in the 21st century. Permanently deployed MAGs, equipped with this robust TBMD capability would provide a powerful, uninterrupted deterrent effect on potential adversaries considering the employment of TBMs. This deterrent effect would be significantly reduced under current CVBG deployment patterns by the requirement to employ surface combatants in the defense and escort of the carrier, thereby reducing the forces available to project the TBMD envelope over vulnerable land and sea zones in the region.

Executing the National Military Strategy: Responding

The National Military Strategy identifies "Responding" to the full spectrum of international crises as a second core objective—and one which the CINCs are primarily charged to

accomplish. As articulated in *Forward ... from the Sea*, the Navy has similarly recognized that effective crisis response to the regional exigencies of the 21st century will be a primary responsibility of forward deployed forces, noting that “we must be capable of responding quickly and successfully in support of U.S. theater commanders. Forces deployed for routine exercises and activities undergirding forward presence are also the forces most likely to be called upon to respond rapidly to an emerging crisis.”³¹ As arguably the most challenging aspect of crisis response, the ability to *halt an initial enemy advance* into a friend or ally’s territory will be discussed with respect to the alternate forward presence concept.

CVBGs have traditionally served as the Navy’s force of choice for crisis response and have performed this function quite successfully, as General Schwarzkopf mentioned in the opening quotation. Indeed within hours of the August 2, 1990 Iraqi attack upon Kuwait, the *Independence* and *Eisenhower* carrier battle groups were ordered to the area from their locations in the Straits of Malacca and central Mediterranean, respectively, and were in position to conduct long range strikes as early as August 5.³² As impressive as this may sound however, by August 7 when the two CVBGs were positioned to conduct sustained, effective strikes, Iraqi forces had completely overrun Kuwait and were poised on the Saudi border.

Halting the initial advance of an aggressor short of its objective ranks among the top challenges for U.S. forces in the two Medium Theater War scenario upon which the QDR force is based. If a future adversary should attempt a “smash and grab” act of aggression along the lines of Iraq’s thrust into Kuwait, the ability to stop that aggressor in his tracks will be critical to a successful response. The United States may no longer possess the military capability, not to mention the political will, to once again deploy massive forces overseas to regain an ally’s lost territory. It should also be expected that potential adversaries have themselves learned valuable

lessons from Operation DESERT STORM—especially the importance of denying U.S. and coalition forces sufficient time to mobilize and organize.³³

Each of these factors points to the imperative that U.S. naval forces on station possess sufficient combat capability to rapidly blunt the initial advance of an invader. These forces must have a robust individual self-defense capability--which will be improved upon by the synergistic effects of Network Centric Warfare and systems such as the Cooperative Engagement Capability -- as well as a potent power projection capability to conduct fires in support of stopping the enemy thrust. In the regional conflicts of the next century, a premium will be placed on the ability to “deliver firepower against a target array whose interdiction would give the adversary’s leadership pause to reflect on the utility of proceeding further with its warfare objectives.”³⁴ First and foremost, however, these forces must be there—*in place* and positioned to act immediately during the earliest phases of a conflict. Again, eighty-percent presence and a 3-5 day response time may not prove sufficient to the task, and may ultimately lead to mission failure and the loss of an ally. Of great concern, in addition to lessons learned by potential adversaries, are the advanced weapons systems acquired by many of these states and the subsequent increased vulnerability of U.S. aircraft carriers in the early stages of a conflict. The proliferation of anti-ship cruise missiles, naval mines, and diesel submarines to nations such as Iran has made the prospect of operating CVBGs in littoral environments much more dangerous. As Dr. Andrew Krepinevich has noted, these threats will lead to carriers being “pushed further and further out to sea, at least in the early period of a conflict.”³⁵ Many of the resources of the CVBG will be required to protect the carrier in an ever thicker array of defenses, and will thus be unavailable for other missions required to stem the tide of an enemy’s advance.

The platforms of the MAG, however, contain extensive self-defense capabilities—including the Aegis air defense missile system, embarked anti-submarine helicopters, and (in the near future) an organic, onboard mine countermeasure capability. In addition, vast improvements in offensive weapons systems will enable the MAG to conduct high volume, sustained fires deep ashore, directed in many cases by embarked unmanned aerial vehicles. To complement the existing Tomahawk land attack missile system, the Navy will soon deploy the following advanced capabilities onboard surface combatants and attack submarines:

- The 5-inch gun, upgraded to 62-caliber, and capable of firing to a range of 63 miles,
- The Vertical Gun Advanced Ship, a twin 155-mm gun, “launching” a guided projectile out to 200 miles,
- The land-attack variant of the SM-2 Standard missile, with a range of 150 miles, and
- The Tactical Tomahawk, with improved range, guidance, and the ability to loiter over the target and be re-targeted in flight.³⁶

The rapid employment of such systems by the permanently deployed elements of the MAG would provide the CINC with an on-call, rapid response capability to answer the challenge of the initial enemy advance without placing countless pilots’ lives at risk. In addition, the establishment of a protective umbrella by the forces of the MAG during this early stage can provide the force protection required for the *cruising* CVBG ordered to the crisis area. Under the alternative approach, in the early period of a conflict the MAG would deliver robust fires ashore to halt the advance, as well as engage maritime threats to establish a degree of battlespace dominance and force protection sufficient to allow entry of the CVBG into the theater.

Limitations and Concerns

This alternative approach to naval presence is not a panacea for every conceivable threat or challenge that the CINCs will likely face in the next century, nor will its implementation be a simple matter to carry out. There are clearly situations when the uninterrupted, extended presence of an aircraft carrier and its air wing will be required in an AOR. The establishment

and enforcement of a *no-fly zone* in a region without host nation support for land-based aircraft represents one of these specific instances. Without an aircraft carrier, the ships of the MAG could not effectively conduct no-fly zone operations, lacking the ability to perform aerial interception, positive identification, and escort operations.³⁷ In this case, the tactical and operational flexibility that the carrier brings to U.S. naval forces in the theater would be indispensable, and a modification to the *cruising* concept would be required in order to ensure continuous naval presence.

The transition to a *cruising* CVBG and *Horizon* MAG scheme by the Navy would have to be managed carefully, with the purpose and merits of the change communicated effectively to regional friends and allies. The United States would need to pay particular attention to regions where the Navy had previously maintained continuous carrier presence to signal interest, for as Jacquelyn Davis of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis points out, “any change in the character of our presence deployments could at least be perceived as diminished interests, particularly in the context of global concerns over an American (international) retrenchment.”³⁸

Within the Navy, significant cultural challenges would also need to be overcome. The adoption of a *cruising* posture for CVBGs would probably not meet as much resistance as the *Horizon* concept of rotating crews to permanently deployed ships. Proponents could point to the many decades of successful dual crew operations by the ballistic missile submarine force, which deploys alternating Blue and Gold crews on nuclear deterrent patrols originating in their homeport. The *Horizon* concept differs significantly, however, with personnel normally rotated as watch teams and individuals to platforms not in their homeports, but while deployed *overseas*, “at the tip of the spear.” Commanding officers must be made to buy into the fact that many of their personnel will not have trained and conducted work-ups with them--a significant comfort

factor for ship commanders today. The CNO SSG has recommended that the Navy utilize the DD-21 Land Attack Destroyer as a proof of concept platform for *Horizon*, a proposal that is currently under consideration.³⁹ Successful experimentation with the concept would demonstrate the many benefits of *Horizon*--benefits to both the Navy and the individual sailor--and assist in overcoming the cultural resistance of Navy leadership.

Conclusion

Beginning with President Truman's June 1950 decision to sortie the *Valley Forge* carrier task force from the Philippines to the waters off Korea in the face of the North Korean invasion, American Presidents have continually called upon the naval forward presence of aircraft carrier battle groups as their first option in crisis response.⁴⁰ But the dawning of the 21st century brings new challenges and threats to the national security interests of the United States, quite unlike those encountered in the Cold War era. The regional focus of the National Military Strategy and its cornerstone objectives to "Shape, Respond, and Prepare Now" demands a fresh approach to naval forward presence--an alternative that best meets the requirements of the CINCs to execute that strategy. The constancy and quality of presence of *Horizon* MAGs, complemented by the flexible, potent response embodied in *cruising* CVBGs, provides these capabilities to the combatant commanders. Organized, deployed, and operated in a manner best suited to promote U.S. influence, deter potential adversaries, and respond quickly and effectively to crises, the *cruising* CVBG and *Horizon* MAG construct provides considerable promise and merits further consideration by the Navy. At the conclusion of the 21st century, perhaps history will record a new cliché, reflecting the first question posed by future U.S. Presidents when faced with a regional crisis--"How soon can the regional MAG respond?"

Notes

¹Jacquelyn K. Davis, Aircraft Carriers and the Role of Naval Power in the Twenty-First Century. National Security Papers, no.13. (Cambridge, MA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1993), 21.

²Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr., A New Navy for a New Era (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 1996),iii.

³Davis, Aircraft Carriers, 21.

⁴Jeffrey G. Barlow, "Answering the Call: Carriers in Crisis Response since World War II," Naval Aviation News, January-February 1997, 14-21.

⁵Navy Department. Policy for Carrier Battle Groups. OPNAVINST 3501.316 (Washington: 1995), 1.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Admiral J. Paul Reason, Sailing New Seas, The Newport Papers, no.13 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1998), 19.

⁸CNO Strategic Studies Group XVI, Naval Warfare Innovation Concept Team Reports (Newport, RI: 1997), VIII-1 - VIII-12.

⁹Navy Department. Policy for Carrier Battle Groups, 1.

¹⁰Craig T. Schauppner, "Optimal Aircraft Carrier Deployment Scheduling," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA: 1996), 9.

¹¹Navy Department. Policy for Carrier Battle Groups, 2.

¹²Philip A. Dur, "Presence: Forward, Ready, Engaged" in Strategy and Force Planning, 2nd Ed., ed. Strategy and Force Planning Faculty (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1997), 553-554.

¹³Schauppner, xiv.

¹⁴Congressional Budget Office, CBO Papers: Improving the Efficiency of Forward Presence by Aircraft Carriers (Washington: 1996), 9.

¹⁵Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress: Naval Forward Presence and the Size of the Navy (Washington: 1992), CRS-20.

¹⁶Navy Department, Forward ... from the Sea (Washington, 1994), 4.

¹⁷Barlow, 14.

¹⁸CDR J. D. Oliver, "Use the Carriers or Lose Them," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1993, 71.

¹⁹Congressional Research Service, CRS-8 - 9.

²⁰VADM William Owens, "Mediterranean Fleet: A Test-bed for Navy's Future," Armed Forces Journal International, July 1992, 32-35.

²¹Navy Department. Policy for Carrier Battle Groups, encl (1), 1-4.

²²CNO SSG, VIII-4.

²³GEN John M. Shalikashvili, National Military Strategy of the United States: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now: a Military Strategy for a New Era (Washington: Department of Defense, 1997), 12-13.

²⁴Linton F. Brooks, Peacetime Influence through Forward Naval Presence, Occasional Paper (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, 1993), 15.

²⁵Ibid, 16.

²⁶Ibid, 32.

²⁷Ibid, 12.

²⁸Shalikashvili, 2.

²⁹John D. Gresham, "Navy Area Ballistic Missile Defense Coming on Fast," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1999, 61.

³⁰Navy Department, Forward ... from the Sea, 4.

³¹Ibid, 5.

³²Department of Defense, Conduct of the Persian Gulf War (Washington: Department of Defense, 1992), 19.

³³Davis, Aircraft Carriers, 9.

³⁴Ibid, 8.

³⁵Krepinevich, 27.

³⁶Scott C. Truver, "Tomorrow's Fleet," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1999, 87-88.

³⁷CAPT Robert F. Johnson, USN (Ret.), "Carriers Are Forward Presence," Naval Aviation News, Jan-Feb 1997, 34.

³⁸Jacquelyn K. Davis, Forward Presence and U.S. Security Policy: Implications for Force Posture, National Security Papers, no.16 (Cambridge, MA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1995), 44.

³⁹CNO SSG, VIII-11.

⁴⁰Barlow, 16.

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